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ABSTRACT

Pronunciation teaching of the segmental aspects needs to be balanced with the inclusion of learner awareness of stress, rhythm, intonation and meaningful production. Yet many formats for pronunciation teaching do not place these skills and an awareness of the suprasegmental features in either a communicative format or a specific speaking situation. Learners' reasons for improving pronunciation may, however, be quite specific. For many ESL and EFL learners skillful pronunciation is linked with effective presentation in an international context of developing globalization. The paper presents a case for the application of pronunciation development to the needs of learners who are undertaking presentation skills courses or speech communication training. A range of pronunciation skills applicable to presentation speaking courses are presented within a framework of integrating accuracy skills with fluency development. Evidence of the importance of the links between suprasegmental awareness and production is discussed. Secondly, the practical application of speech production approaches will be linked to the growing marketplace demand for presentation skills in both EFL and ESL situations. (Author)

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Integrating Pronunciation for Fluency in Presentation Skills

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Abstract

Pronunciation teaching of the segmental aspects needs to be balanced with the inclusion of learner awareness of stress, rhythm, intonation and meaningful production. Yet many formats for pronunciation teaching do not place these skills and an awareness of the suprasegmental features in either a communicative format or a specific speaking situation. Learners reasons for improving pronunciation may however be quite specific. For many ESL and EFL learners skilful pronunciation is linked with effective presentation in an international context of developing globalisation.

The paper presents a case for the application of pronunciation development to the needs of learners who are undertaking presentation skills courses or speech communication training. A range of pronunciation skills applicable to presentation speaking courses are presented within a framework of integrating accuracy skills with fluency development.

Evidence of the importance of the links between suprasegmental awareness and production is discussed. Secondly, the practical application of speech production approaches will be linked to the growing marketplace demand for presentation skills in both EFL and ESL situations.

Introduction

Pronunciation teaching has had periods of prominence and periods of neglect in the field of English Language Teaching. The need to focus on being accurate with sound has always remained while the emphases on pronunciation have differed with attention to fluency development through communicative speaking tasks. In discussing speaking skills and the balance between fluency and accuracy (Brumfit, 1984) it becomes necessary to define what we mean by pronunciation teaching. Pronunciation activities provide learning experiences to develop accurate control over the sound system (Murphy, 1991). It is worthwhile to signal that speaking activities often focus on providing opportunities for improving oral fluency, with opportunities for getting the message across through interpersonal activities. This paper will suggest that pronunciation activities can be integrated with fluency development within the format of presentation skills so that there is a close relationship between being accurate and communicating effectively. Presentation skills are speaking skills for an audience whom you wish to inform or persuade in an engaging way. To be an effective speaker in a public situation one needs to make use of rhythm, intonation, stress, pitch and non-verbals. All of these suprasegmentals are part of pronunciation development with research suggesting their importance. Research will be discussed and related to integrating suprasegmental awareness with presentation skills.

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A Broad View of Speaking Skills

Speaking as a skill may be seen in two important groupings. The first is that of motor perceptive skills and the second is that of interaction skills. Audio-lingual approaches emphasised perceiving, recalling and articulating, (Mackey, 1965), the motor perceptive skills of hearing and saying the sounds, but to purely focus on these is rather like learning to ride a bicycle on a road with no traffic. The interaction skills of a language using situational awareness are also necessary. Wilkins (1975) points out that learners must be able to transfer `knowledge from a language learning situation to a language using situation' (1975: 76). For to extend the argument, the motor perceptive skills will often be context-less and the learner may not transfer them to comprehensible output (Swain, 1985). In another framework, pronunciation skills need to transfer to speaking skills in context. Activities for doing this then involve placing pronunciation in a communication situation in order that motor perceptive skills and interaction skills can be integrated. In a succinct summary of interaction skills Bygate (1987) notes their importance.

> Interaction skills involve making decisions about communication, such as: what to say, how to say it, and whether to develop it, in accordance with one's intentions, while maintaining the desired relations with others. Note that our notions of what is right or wrong now depend on such things as what we have decided to say, how successful we have been so far, whether it is useful to continue the point, what our intentions are, and what sorts of relations we intend to establish or maintain with our interlocutors. This of course is true of all communication. (Bygate, 1987: 6)

Pronunciation and the Development of Meaning.

Interaction skills have become the subject of many programmes and much text production for spoken English while views of pronunciation as a linguistic competency have led to beliefs that pronunciation is primarily the development of phonemic discrimination - a motor perceptive skill. Yet pronunciation is now being revisited (Celce-Murcia and Goodwin, 1991; Dalton and Seidlhofer, 1994;Laroy, 1995; Naiman, 1987;) in a move away from the traditional phonemic based approach. There is consideration of placing the motor-perceptive skills, which are the prime focus of pronunciation teaching, in a communicative framework. The accuracy focus of many programmes needs a context to link the smaller units of speech to explorations of fluency, being message oriented instead of only means oriented both because learners do not transfer learning and because of learners' needs.

There is a realisation that one may integrate part-skills, such as knowing the segments of speech, with practical situations of production (Littlewood, 1992). The part skills of knowing the segments can be put in a larger context in terms of what we know from discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis reveals pronunciation skills as being both for expressing referential meaning and part of an interactional dynamic. Sounds are a critical part of the process in which we communicate meaning in a complex mix of vocalic, grammatical and sociolinguistic experience (Brazil, Coulthard and Johns, 1980). Pronunciation is then the physical competence of hearing and producing sounds as

Suprasegmentals and Non-Verbals

Studies point to links between prosodic features, in particular rhythm and gesture, noting that pause and the framing of important or foregrounded ideas is often accompanied by non-verbals (Gilbert, 1994). To cite Pegolo (1993):

Hadar (1989: 246), in a recent investigation of the role of head movement in speech production, cites a number of studies which strongly suggest that `speech production may be enhanced by body movements, both motorically and symbolically'. Hadar's experiments allowed him to postulate in greater detail how motor enhancement, i.e. improved co-ordination of the articulatory organs, may occur and thus, by extension, how speech may be rendered more intelligible... Hadar is suggesting that such pre-vocal head movements actually enhance speech intelligibility because of their coordinative function on the articulatory organs and thus on production of individual sounds at the segmental level (ibid, 55).

Pegolo develops the argument further by focusing on how tensions in the body and the effect of making meaning through speech production involve external and internal movement. Speech therapists have for many decades recognised the link between movement and mastering sound. Second language teachers working on speech production could note that research in aphasia therapy supports the role of suprasegmental development through structured techniques which work with tempo, rhythm, distinct stress and gesturing to create awareness (Shewan, 1968; Sparks and Holland, 1976).

Guberina (1985: 40) has written that speech rhythm and intonation have both evolved `genetically from movement, internal and external...' Thus, movement which is compatible with suprasegmental features is given priority over segmental aspects because rhythm and intonation are believed to set up the appropriate tensions for the perception and production of individual sounds (Renard 1970, Guberina 1976 cited in Pegolo). First language public speaker trainers have also written at length about the importance of linking movement and effective presentation using the suprasegmentals (Turk,1985).

Apart from the importance of suprasegmentals from a motor-perceptive orientation there is the importance of units of meaning created by pauses and intonation. In developing fluency it is worthwhile to focus on the units of speech which relate to concepts of intonation.

Utterances and Fluency

Given that our speech is determined by breathe and breathe control it is not surprising that units of production relate to our biological limitations and our neurological limitations. Our physical production echoes our thinking. Units of speech in terms of information and intonation units may differ with the essential division of tonal and stress based languages yet all work within what we could term a `breath unit.' There are only so many sounds one can produce in a breath. Researchers have become interested in links between the breath unit, which can be termed an utterance and the information unit (Crookes, 1990).

well as the meaningful development of the sound and word level skills through linking speech performance, and purpose. The part skills of production may develop best if linked to sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence (Canale and Swain, 1980). in learning situations where there is a balance between the physical motor-perceptive skills, and situations where learners will transfer the parts of productive speech to a range of competencies.

Pronunciation development may then be seen as the development of the way we convey meaning by being intelligible through integrating motor-perceptive skills with delivering a clear message. One area of pronunciation methodology where an awareness of discourse contexts and communication skills meet is that of applying an awareness of suprasegmentals to the conveying of meaning. It is in focusing on suprasegmentals that one sees the notions of accuracy and fluency, motor-perceptive skills and communication strategies meet in a useful approach.

Approaches to Suprasegmental Skills Development

Much traditional work on segmental analysis and teaching was conducive to ordered and structured safe approaches to pronunciation development. The `building block' nature of consonant and vowel segments and the influence of behaviourism lead to conducive contrastive analysis and neatly ordered texts tailored for the language laboratory market (Baker, 1977).

Most modern researchers and practitioners agree that suprasegmental features such as stress, rhythm and intonation are if anything, more important than segmental features (Bradford, 1988, Brown, 1992; Kenworthy, 1987; Morley, 1991). Given that being intelligible involves interacting it is worth quoting a communication study on the weight of importance in communication. Mehrabion and Ferris (1967) cited in Brown (1992) have the following interesting results for the weight of importance in communication: face 55 per cent; tone 38 per cent; words 7 per cent. Tone in its general sense is conveyed by stress, rhythm and intonation which leaves little return if one is focusing all of a pronunciation course on phonemic discrimination: a segmental approach.

This is not to deny the role of difficult sounds and mastering them as <u>part</u> of a programme but the fact is that many texts on pronunciation teaching took little cognisance of research into listeners perceptions and the importance of suprasegmentals (Brazil et al, 1980; Halliday, 1985; Brown, 1990). Many pronunciation teaching texts centre on the phonemic discrimination approach oblivious to a mass of research on how people decode the spoken word. Some specialised texts recognise the need to balance segmental work with intonation development demonstrating that while individual sounds may cause difficulties the rhythmic patterns created by the occurrence of stress are an under rated factor in decoding (Roach,1983; Rogerson and Gilbert,1990). An example of a useful decoding tool is that content words tend to be stressed while generally function words, connectives and affixes tend to be unstressed (Hamill, 1976; Brown, 1990).

It is within one breathe that there is an utterance, an accepted unit of describing speech. An utterance may have a time boundary of one to eight seconds (Scollon, 1974) and it has features that are worth considering when comparing spoken English and written English, for in developing fluency we face the issue of units of language to be taught. An utterance is a stream of speech with the following characteristics.

1. It is bounded by pauses of variable length.

2. It is under one intonation contour

3. It constitutes an idea unit

This definition (Hall, 1996) derived from earlier research (Kroll, 1977; Long, 1980; Crookes and Rulon, 1985; and Crookes, 1988; Crookes ,1990) has valuable features for both discourse analysis and teaching. It has been applied to research into talk (Hall, 1991) and found to link to "changes in content" (Shewan, 1988: 124).

Speech can then be analysed, conceptualised and understood as the organisation and development of utterances, which are not always complete sentences, but are the building blocks of information. Halliday (1985) uses the term `tone unit' with many identical features to the term `utterance'. In his incisive work he links the tone unit with an information unit describing it as the basic building block of speech. The effort of production and the stress are seen to reflect the importance of particular pieces of information.

Coulthard and Brazil (1982) also describe the importance of intonational units in terms of interaction. Intonation is defined as a major aspect of defining meanings, oppositions, contrasts and comparisons. Speakers present concepts foregrounded as important information or backgrounded as that which a speaker already knows through stress patterns and accented markers (Taylor, 1993). The marking of important information is through attention and greater effort in emphasising the important utterance. The utterance, deserves greater attention as a teaching unit for fluency development.

Developing Learner Awareness of Utterances

Raising learners awareness depends on our motivation, and developing both pronunciation and listening ability for utterances beyond the sound recognition level. Chances are that many EFL students would not have perceived English in its spoken form, that is a series of utterances, rather they may have heard read aloud grammatically correct sentences. The heart of the rhythmic system - syllable length may also be initially difficult for students to apprehend through the ear but it may be demonstrated through other senses (Wong, 1987) graphing, drawing or as Judy Gilbert an American oracy specialist is fond of doing through the rubber band as a demonstration of stretching out the syllables.

Listening to what Gilbert (1993, 1994) terms the baseline emphasis where content words are emphasised and structure words de-emphasised is useful. For learners need to listen in order to understand, and then produce with a focus on the

semantic cues, the information, and not a focus on syntax (Rivers 1984; Mendelsohn, 1994). Listening to the focus word, to that which is emphasised to foreground information is another useful skill which parallels L1 public speaking text instruction modes, a point I shall develop later. There are after all, many ways of saying `I love you' but all speakers know that in all speech, the relationship and the purpose link to how one says something.

Graphics may highlight the focus word and they are also useful in defining the information unit, the utterance. Learners enjoy listening to dialogues or lines and deciding what mood is being expressed. For in listening the learner builds meaning beyond the linguistic level and then sees communicative applications to building fluency. For pronunciation is not only a motor-perceptive skill. It is also a skill for interaction in that tone, stress and rhythm can, with one set of words, produce a wide range of results.

Putting Pronunciation Fluency into Formats

Pronunciation development of suprasegmental features involves changing perspectives of which pronunciation model is taught, which means of developing skills are used and what specialised areas of language link to pronunciation skills development.

The question of which pronunciation is taught needs to be seen in the light of English as an intranational and international language (von Schon, 1987). The complexity of World Englishes is becoming a field of research with many issues as most English speakers are non-native speakers Kachru (1994). Clearly the day of RP and the Oxford-Cambridge-London triangle is over with the contesting mid-Atlantic accent along with a growing recognition of various modes of the international medium (Kachru, 1982). Morley describes a need for "reasonably intelligible pronunciation" so that learners are "served with instruction that will give them communicative empowerment" (1991: 489).

The types of instruction that link pronunciation and communication have began in the last decade to broaden in scope. Some modes of learning place pronunciation in communicative contexts in which the focus is on conveying a message rather than practising sounds in isolation (Pica, 1984). The use of dialogues, pair work segmental practise and group processes marks a communicative emphasis but does not incorporate suprasegmentals or draw learners' attention to the form of the language. Recent SLA research suggests that attention to form of language is useful (Ellis, 1989; Long, 1988) and recent texts show a developing awareness of the importance of suprasegmentals in conveying meaning.

Conveying meaning through mixing the motor-perceptive awareness and interaction skills needs a format of speaking tasks. Recording short speeches in groups and interviewing peers are useful techniques (Morley, 1993). Linking listening comprehension skills and pronunciation is another important area. The building blocks of word stress, reduced vowels and patterns are often best taught in utterances which emphasise basic rules for context and structure words. Research

informs recent texts which mix listening awareness with prosodic features (Gilbert, 1993, Laroy, 1995).

One difficulty that all texts face is the movement from part-skill learning to putting the parts into a meaningful situation. It is crucial to place suprasegmental practice in context given that much research stresses that understanding a message links to suprasegmentals. In an example of EFL classrooms Evans (1993) found teaching skill-specific and integrative approaches to pronunciation useful. The Japanese learners benefited from suprasegmental practice through marking texts for thought groups, shifting the emphasis in sentences, and changing the moods of scripts by exploring different intonational patterns. Success with the segmental difficulties led the writer to term his approach as `Right side-up Pronunciation for the Japanese.' The approach also used specific role play and presentation speaking tasks based on learners' ideas on the situations that they needed speaking for.

A task analysis, when we ask why do are learners need to talk and to whom do they need to talk to would seem in order. In the field of specific purpose teaching we find the most detailed examples of task analysis in terms of speech performance. Yet even in detailed speaking texts where accuracy is critical, pronunciation aspects are often missing. In aviation English where functions and details are delineated as if life and death depend on it, as they do, there is a lack of attention to pronunciation aspects of the code. Listening examples are provided but little credence is given to the critical role of suprasegmentals (Leveson, 1984; Robertson, 1987).

The functional approach and clear statements of speech needs inform other specific purpose fluency texts for example; texts for the hospitality industry (Potter and Assumpca, 1980; Adamson, 1987; Revell and Stott, 1988) and texts for specific communicative functions such as business socialising (Ellis and Driscoll, 1987). Yet it is rare for recent specific purpose fluency texts to acknowledge that intermediate level learners as well as beginners need to be aware of prosodic speech features. It is if pronunciation is only gained by listening. Yet a very recent work in response to a large and profitable specific purpose market incorporates the recent upsurge in pronunciation teaching. This is fluency development for International Teaching Assistants.

International teaching assistants are a major part of the American academic scene and their presence creates a demand for clear instruction and accurate presentation (Morley, 1991). Analysis of the tasks of spoken English performance of speakers of other languages in the TA situation found that pronunciation is a major issue, as ITAs are often at a high level of context awareness and a lower level of speech delivery skill. This situation is paralleled in many of the ASEAN region's ESP courses (Tan Chor Eng and Hall, 1995).

In work with international teaching assistants the types of specific speaking tasks were analysed by three teachers from the University of Minnesota. (Smith, Meyers and Burkhalter, 1992). ITAs need to answer questions, so question and answer intonation is featured in instruction. They need to separate longer sentences into thought groups, a tip that old-fashioned best selling writer Dale Carnegie would applaud (Carnegie, 1962). Listening awareness is integrated with marking of rising and falling intonation patterns. It is as if this needs-derived text

recognises an old public speaking maxim: If you want to speak well, listen to a good speaker. If you want to say it well, know your topic, your audience and your purpose. Keep it short and sweet and break up your ideas into short statements that suit your communicative purpose.

Learners will make the effort to develop tone, rhythm, pitch and appropriate stress if it is purposeful. International telephone operators will work at concise accurate sentences while hotel staff focus on politeness markers. An increasing area of more general need is the ability to present ideas internationally and to be fluent in presentation speaking especially given a growing globalisation of markets, and the use of English to sell ideas and products across borders.

Pronouncing and Presenting in a Purposeful Context

Presentation speaking as opposed to two-way speaking in a reciprocal situation is highly demanding. Speaking in front of others is stressful and it is there that the consciously acquired features of our speech often slip. The need to frame and mark information is an important part of presenting effectively. If one speaks using a manuscript, oral communication textbooks advise that the a speaker mark off the pause boundaries (Turk, 1985). This technique parallels awareness of the utterance. Many public speaking texts contain sections that look identical to recent ELT suprasegmental work - features such as stress the important word, use the pause, highlight by volume, link the question to a rising pitch and so on (Fletcher, 1990; Michael, 1988; Payne and Prentice, 1990).

A purposeful context for suprasegmental development in terms of providing motivation and transfer situations is presentation skills development. Presentation skills are now marketable as a useful intranational and international skill (Ellis and O'Driscoll, 1992; O'Connor and Pilbeam, 1987). Effective presentation to sell ideas involves suprasegmental development. The concepts of framing an important word are the defining of an utterance, with the emphasising of an important selling point through appropriate changes in tone, volume and pitch. People selling ideas as native English speakers or second language learners wanting to present internationally all need this skills development.

With globalisation there are more learners who will need to confidently present ideas in international contexts. Students who may have seminars as part of their international education, academics presenting in international forums, businessmen travelling abroad to sell products. All of them will, for better or worse, be judged on their speaking beyond the delivery of individual sounds. Ideas will be presented with body language, tone and emphasis. One can not deny the importance of phonemic discrimination but suprasegmental development has an important role in effective speaking. In presentation speaking there is a valid format for focusing on suprasegments to develop fluency in spoken English.

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